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Standing Up a More Capable Joint Task Force Headquarters

When the Department of Defense (DoD) is called on to respond to domestic or international crises, it typically uses a joint task force (JTF) to quickly integrate forces and capabilities across the military services. The use of JTFs has increased over the past decade, and their range of missions has expanded. Recent well-known examples include building partner capacity in the Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), civil support for Hurricane Katrina (JTF-Katrina), and disaster relief in Haiti (JTF-Haiti).

There has been some concern among senior policymakers in DoD that the headquarters element of a JTF has some serious shortcomings. JTF headquarters (JTF HQ) are staffed by personnel from the tactical headquarters of the military services as well as by joint augmentees, who add depth in critical areas. Specific concerns about JTF headquarters include the length of time needed to establish them, the ability to staff them appropriately, and their ability to coordinate with the military services, U.S. government agencies, and forces from other countries. The U.S. Army asked RAND Arroyo Center to help improve the Army's ability to quickly establish a more capable JTF HQ.

JTF HQs Face Planning, Staffing, and Training Challenges

The Arroyo team analyzed the range of missions, deployment patterns, staffing processes, and training opportunities associated with past and ongoing joint force operations. The team concluded that JTF HQs had too little time before deployments to allow for long-lead planning, organizational activities, and training. The Arroyo study included an analysis of 45 JTFs operating from 2000 through 2005—data were available for 16 of these regarding the amount of time JTF HQs had to prepare for deployment. The team's analysis showed that about 70 percent of the JTF HQs had 5 weeks or less to prepare

Key Points

- Demand for Joint Task Force headquarters (JTF HQs) is likely to remain high.
- The Army can provide the core of many JTF HQs, but other services and government agencies must contribute some key personnel.
- DoD processes to identify and assign key personnel to JTF HQs need to be improved.

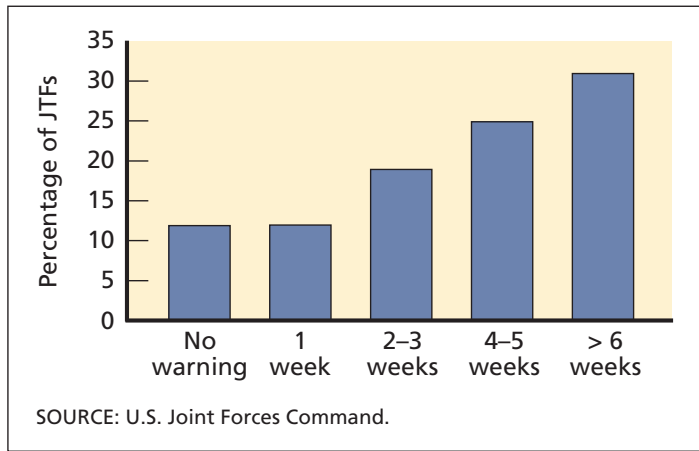
for deployment (see the figure on the following page).¹ Consequently, JTF HQs are compelled to develop operating concepts and plans on the fly, even for complex missions.

Although they deploy quickly, JTF HQs can take up to six months to obtain all of the personnel they require to carry out planning, intelligence, logistics, communications, and other command and control functions. The process of tailoring and augmenting JTF HQs to obtain the number of personnel and the skills needed is lengthy: It includes designing the JTF headquarters, developing a joint manning document, and obtaining approval of the manning document from the combatant commander and Joint Staff. In addition, key personnel are in high demand, so JTF HQs are in competition with other service and joint headquarters for experienced staff and key specialists. As a result, JTF HQs often lack staff in important specialties when they begin operations, and their effectiveness is limited to some degree until they receive the specialties key to the assigned mission.

¹ See also Armando X. Estrada, *Joint Task Force Requirements Determination: A Review of the Organization and Structure of Joint Task Forces*, Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2005.

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Time Between Warning Order and JTF Deployment



Tactical Headquarters of Army Corps and Divisions Can Serve as JTF HQs

The Army can improve the speed with which JTF HQs may be deployed and enhance their capability by providing permanent fully manned, equipped, and trained units to serve as the core of JTF HQs. These units would be formed within the Army's corps and division headquarters. The Arroyo team recommends that the Army assign its corps headquarters to serve as JTF HQs when missions are broad in scope or large in scale, such as recent counterinsurgency and stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Division headquarters could serve as JTF HQs when the corps headquarters are already busy—and when missions are narrower in scope or smaller in scale.

Corps and division headquarters will still need significant augmentation to be fully functional in a joint role. Thus

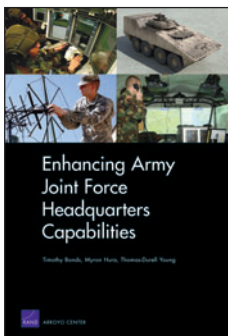
the Arroyo team recommends improving the process for assigning staff who are outside the parent unit headquarters. For example, to fill billets more quickly, Army headquarters and the major Army commands can help the combatant commanders develop mission-specific joint manning documents and interagency agreements.

JTF HQs Should Become More Integrated with Other Forces

Waiting until arrival in the theater is too late to begin coordinating all the elements that contribute to a joint operation. JTF HQs need to develop end-to-end concepts of operation for operational and tactical-level tasks in cooperation with the combatant commands, the other services, and other government agencies, and they need to train with these organizations before deployments. JTF HQs also need to identify the capabilities they depend on in each of these organizations (e.g., air power) and develop habitual relationships with them to minimize risks. Preparing potential JTF HQs to exercise command and control will require an investment on the part of DoD and other government agencies as well as the Army.

Conclusion

None of the actions recommended in the Arroyo study will be easy to implement. They will require the Army, the other services, and other U.S. government agencies to commit troops, civilian specialists, training time, and other resources. But the reality is that the demand for JTFs will continue, and if history is any guide, the Army will face the lion's share of this demand. ■



This research brief describes work done by the RAND Arroyo Center and documented in *Enhancing Army Joint Force Headquarters Capabilities*, by Timothy M. Bonds, Myron Hura, and Thomas-Durell Young, MG-675-A, 2010 (available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG675.html>). This research brief was written by Susan K. Woodward. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.

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